

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM EXPLAINED

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One of the most healing prayers that I have ever found is the **Twenty-Third Psalm of David** found in the Old Testament of the Bible. Repeated often, it can help turn around negative thinking and assist a person with fears, as can few others, in my experience.

My own use of this prayer. A number of years ago I was very ill, and discovered how extremely helpful this prayer can be. Even though I did not believe the prayer at first, I simply repeated it 20 to 200 times a day. It was an effort to change my mind away from total despair, negativity and fear. One could say I brainwashed myself with it.

At first, it was just words on a page. However, after about a year of doing this, I noticed that I was actually feeling the meaning and sense of the prayer. I actually started to believe in and feel the message of hope, love and healing that it contains.

So even if the words do not ring true for you, or if it seems too good to be true, just repeating the words and thinking about them, can help them to come alive for you.

Retracing. Many prayers and psalms in the Bible are wonderful to read and think about. However, the 23rd psalm, in particular, is important for this website and nutritional balancing because I believe it is all about the *retracing process*. Retracing is a very special healing

process that occurs in everyone who follows a nutritional balancing program.

Retracing rarely occurs with any other healing program. It almost never occurs when someone follows conventional medical methods, so most people are not familiar with it. However, it also does not occur much with most holistic and naturopathic healing methods. This is because they simply do not heal at deep enough levels. I call these programs 'remedy programs', as compared to the delicate balancing and other changes that occur with nutritional balancing science.

Retracing is the process of going back into your symptoms and conditions, and also into your fears and anger, often and making them right or "tying up loose ends". One might say you must reframe, redo, undo, and restore the body and the mind completely to fully heal physical, mental and emotional imbalances. This is a deep healing process, and nutritional balancing programs seem to be able to accomplish it easily. You will see below why I think the 23rd psalm of David is about retracing. To read more about it, read [Retracing](#) and [Trauma Retracing](#) on this site. Here is this simple psalm, followed by an explanation.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me besides clear waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his namesake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou

anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.

EXPLANATION

The setting for the psalm. King David, who wrote the psalm, grew up and worked as a shepherd, so he knew a lot about sheep and shepherding. He loved the metaphor of seeing God, or the Lord, as a shepherd. The shepherd's job is to care for his flock, making sure they are safe, nourished, calm and happy at all times.

Sheep are vulnerable to danger from wolves and other predators because they cannot run very fast, and they are not always smart enough to avoid danger. To care for them correctly and safely, sheep require a shepherd to take them to the fertile areas to graze, protect them from predators and other hazards, and keep them together so they don't stray from the group. This is the job of the shepherd. One can extend this idea and say that God does this for us, if we submit to His will.

Let us now explore Psalm 23 line by line and phrase by phrase:

The Lord is my shepherd. This proclaims the metaphor of the psalm, that god is like our shepherd. That is, he helps us to find food, water, work, love, friends and all that we need. He also protects us from evil. He also gently or firmly prods us when we step out of line and deviate from the way of living set down in the Bible as being correct.

I shall not want. This is a very powerful statement, although it is not explained in detail in the psalm until later. I interpret it to mean that I will have everything I need if I allow God to be my shepherd. I may not have everything the ego wants, but I will be cared for, loved, and provided for very well, indeed.

This line is one of the most powerful in the prayer. It is a blunt and frank statement or affirmation. I shall not want means I will be okay. I will have health, money, friends, family, respect, love and all else. That is how I interpret it. The line sort of wakes one up from the dead and says you can have it all, at least what you need, when you elect to have God run your life. Later in the prayer this idea is explored more.

I shall be free of want also expresses or is an affirmation that my life will not be controlled by 'wanting' all the time. Always wanting things is a miserable way to live, but a common one. The same idea is expressed in the Tenth Commandment given to Moses in the Old Testament: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." So this is another way of understanding this line of the psalm.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. Sheep require plenty of green pasture on which to graze or to eat. So at one level, this line means that God will provide all of my food and other needs. It deepens and repeats the idea that I shall not want for anything, and that God takes care of me.

At a deeper level, it means that God provides nourishment for the body, the mind and the soul that is wholesome, healthful, and appetizing for me. It does not say I must struggle to make ends

meet. It says God will lead me to the green pastures, which means all things go.

Notice that it says he *maketh me* to lie down. It does not say he suggests that I lie down. At times, we are forced to just rest. This is an aspect of retracing.

He leadeth me besides the clear waters.

This continues the theme of the previous line in the psalm. The still waters may represent peace, love, harmony and beauty.

He restoreth my soul. When someone is retracing old traumas to restore health and joy, one often feels that the soul has been somehow lost or stolen or destroyed. This line is extremely comforting for those who have this feeling about their lives.

He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his namesake. When one is healing and retracing, often one does not know in what direction to turn and to go. This assures one that the Lord will lead you in directions of righteousness, meaning paths that are wholesome and with full integrity.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for though art with me. For many people undergoing the journey of healing and retracing, this is the most important line in the psalm, though certainly not the only important one. It tells us that yes, you may need to walk in difficult territory in your life. However, you need not fear, for the Lord is with you. When one retraces, one indeed often needs to move back into issues and health conditions that need correcting, healing and perhaps reframing or a different understanding.

Anyone who has done it know this to be the case.

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Traditionally, shepherds carried a rod and a staff to guide the sheep and to ward off wolves or other predators that would harm the sheep. The metaphor is that the Lord also has his rod and his staff. You may get prodded or pushed, at times, *and it is for your good*. It may be for your protection and to keep you on your path. The rod and the staff in fact are there to comfort you and know that you are cared for and loved.

This is a critical concept when one is on a nutritional balancing program that often pushes the body in certain directions that may not seem pleasant, at times.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. This is a very interesting line. It implies that you will encounter "enemies", or forces that do not want you to continue your healing and your retracing. It also says that you will be taken care of even in the midst of your opponents. It does not just say you will survive. It says that a table or a feast will be spread before you, even while you are in the presence of those forces that oppose you. This, indeed, is a wonderful thought to be contemplated.

Thou anointest my head with oil. This is another surprising line. Anointing the head with oil was a practice in biblical days that was used to honor a person and to dignify a person. It means that not only will you be fed or cared for in the presence of your enemies or opposers, but you will be honored and dignified or deeply respected, as well.

In fact, there is something very holy and special about going through the retracing process,

which eventually takes us all back to God and perfection. It is far better than just using remedies, whether they be drugs, vitamins, herbs or others. This is not easy to understand, but it is true.

My cup runneth over. This phrase means that I am given even more than I need or can use. The words form a very powerful image of a cup of elixir that overflows as there is so much of it. It means I am truly abundant, abundantly loved and cared for beyond even my needs or wants.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life. This can be interpreted many ways. What is meant by goodness and mercy shall follow me? To me it means that goodness and mercy shall go with me wherever I go, and whatever I do, even if I am in unfamiliar areas or places. It is a statement of future protection.

The use of the word mercy is interesting. It implies that at times I will sin, or I will not think, act or speak correctly. So this prayer or psalm does not say we will be perfect. Quite the opposite. However, it means that if we allow the Lord to be our shepherd, or guide and overseer, we will be treated mercifully or leniently. Perhaps our past mistakes will be forgiven, or at least their importance diminished.

Retracing has something very profound to do with forgiving the self and letting go of old problems on physical, mental and emotional levels. It is truly merciful and good in this respect, going much more deeply into healing than most of us are accustomed to.

I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

forever. Here one re-affirms where one wants to live and have one's being or consciousness. This line is an affirmation that one chooses to dwell in a particular state of consciousness forever – the “house of the Lord”.

To me, this is not a physical house, but rather it means to keep one's attention focused on the Lord, live by the rules set down by the Lord, submit the will to God's will, and stay with this forever. The words “to dwell” may also be thought of as “to abide”, which means to embrace, to follow, to be one with. This topic is explored in another article on this website entitled [Feeling Connected To God](#).

The power of this prayer may be due in part to the fact that millions of people have used it over the past three or four thousand years. However, it is also a very profound statement of the process that human beings often go through as they heal at deep levels.

If this prayer seems helpful for you, use it often and learn to appreciate that when you truly embrace the concept of God as your shepherd and guide, you will be protected and helped in ways you cannot imagine.

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